

N.M. Failing in Open Government Grades

Oh no, mom, you found my report card!
State — C. Counties — F. Cities — i. Schools — F.
That's a report card no one would want to bring home.

New Mexico's report from the Sunshine Review, a national nonprofit that ranks state and local government openness, is dismal.

The Sunshine Review ranked the websites of the state's school districts on whether they included information on taxes, the budget, meetings, elected and administrative officials, contracts, audits, public records and how to request them, academics and background checks.

The highest scoring districts were Las Cruces with a B, and Albuquerque and Los Lunas with B-minuses. Rio Rancho, Roswell and Farmington got C-minuses. Santa Fe, Los Alamos and Clovis got Ds, and Hobbs, Lovington, Alamogordo and a bunch of others got big fat Fs.

But if you think that's disheartening, *all* New Mexico counties got Fs for transparency, making the state ranked 44th place for overall transparency. Arizona took the top spot, followed by California and Florida.

The state fared somewhat better with a list of pluses for posting the budget, audit reports, state tax information, names of elected and administrative officials with contact information, how to request public records, registered lobbyists and organizations represented by lobbyists including state agencies. It got dinged for difficulty in navigating the site, unavailability of all current contracts and lack of information about ethics and agency lobbying contracts.

The Sunshine Review noted that members of the public should be able to gauge whether a school district is effective, competent, frugal with tax dollars, honest and in compliance with all expectations and relevant laws about public records and meetings.

That pretty much says it all about how open government should work. And the ratings show New Mexico has a lot of homework to do.

LCS



Journal editorial 7/14/10